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Michael Mann’s *Miami Vice*: Protecting White America in the 1980s

Miami Vice ran for five seasons on NBC, from September 1984 to January 1990. However, the first two seasons, when Michael Mann was Executive Producer, are usually considered to be definitive. The later seasons were darker, more cynical, expressing more the mood of a country weighed down by the consequences of Ronald Reagan’s presidency—a soaring national debt coupled with an individualistic ‘greed is good’ mentality and a foreign policy that was increasingly mired in accusations of conspiracy.

Certainly the first two seasons were the most popular with the show regularly featuring in the top ten most watched programs up to 1986, according to the Nielsen ratings. *Miami Vice* compared in popularity with the prime-time soap operas *Dallas* and *Dynasty* though regularly beaten by *The Cosby Show*. *Vice* was the top rating cop show. It was created by Anthony Yerkovich who had worked on the gritty, New York-based *Hill Street Blues*.

In this article I will argue that Mann’s own worldview, as it can be extrapolated from his films, is central to the conservative vision of *Miami Vice*. As we shall see, in Mann’s films there is an understanding of the role of law as foundational to the organisation of society. Living outside the law means living in a different world, a world where social institutions such as the family cannot exist. This is a world of violence. What I will be arguing is that this bifurcated structure underlies the lived reality of *Miami Vice*. Unlike Mann’s films, though, where both worlds exist in the United States, in *Miami Vice*, in the main law creates the space of order that is the United States and lawlessness pervades the world beyond America’s border. I want to suggest that much of the popularity of *Miami Vice* was an effect of this reproduction of a radically conservative ideology that was focused in the show on the defence of the American border from

intrusive flows of people, drugs, guns, money designated as non-American, lawless and threatening to the American way of life rather than being a consequence of the show's apparently radical emphasis on style and the inclusion of quality popular music.

As I have remarked, *Miami Vice* was, in its time, the most popular television cop series. Usually this has been put down to its filmic values coupled with its innovative emphasis on style (this case is best made in Schwichtenberg 1986). In this article I am arguing that, ideologically speaking, *Miami Vice* reproduced a fundamentally conservative worldview, reinforced by Mann's own understanding of the relation between law and lawlessness, and that this was central to the show's popularity. In his book on the series, John-Paul Trutnau writes that:

Mann's TV series is at times more innovative and progressive than traditionalists would prefer. There is, however, an inherent conservativeness reminiscent of Reagan, as well as a distinctly neoconservative notion. (Trutnau 2005, 45)

In what is still the most perceptive discussion of *Miami Vice* to date, David Buxton writes that in the show: 'The two major pillars of Reaganism free market ideology have been condensed into its assemblage: law and order, and conspicuous consumption' (1990, 142). Moreover, as we shall see, the show reproduced traditional American understandings of the position of African Americans and of women. Indeed, its racial politics were very conservative and, as I shall go on to discuss, in particular, the series played to growing (white) American anxieties in the early 1980s over the increase in the number of Hispanics entering and taking up residence in the United States. I will argue that the predominant image of Hispanics in the series was of violent gangsters and that the show echoed and reinforced white American concerns about their future loss of dominance, both in numerical terms but also in cultural terms, in the United States.

In the last years of Jimmy Carter's presidency there was an increasing sense among Americans that they were losing control of the world, and that the apparent chaos, lawlessness, in the world outside the United States was beginning to threaten the American homeland itself. The increasing numbers of Hispanics arriving in the United States, especially as a consequence of the 1980 Cuban Mariel exodus, was understood in these terms. The importation of drugs and black-market profits by Hispanics in *Miami Vice* could be read as a metaphor for the threat to the United States homeland from this

external lawlessness. As we shall see, the United States was defined by its law. From this point of view the role of the Miami Organized Crime Bureau in the program was to protect Miami, and by extension the United States, from the destruction that would ensue if that external lawlessness was allowed into the country. Thus, what appeared as a cutting edge show when read in the terms of a postmodern preoccupation with style, was, in terms of its values, a very conservative program that was in consonance with the anxieties and attitudes that marked the early years of the Reagan presidency.

Style

The myth of the show's origin, told in numerous slightly different ways, is that Yerkovich was responding to a memo written by Brandon Tartikoff, NBC's head of its Entertainment Division, which simply read '*MTV cops.*' *Music Television* had begun in August 1981. The brain child of Robert Pittman, *MTV* was aimed at the first generation raised on television. By 1983 it had revolutionised the music business. Every major record label had its own video department and getting the video of a single played on *MTV* became integral to its success. By 1987 36 million homes had access to *MTV*. The key to *MTV*'s success was, obviously, its combination of music with visual stimulation. In *Dancing in the Distraction Factory*, Andrew Goodwin, quoting David Tetzlaff, notes that: 'Postmodern critics see in *MTV* a mirror image of the ideal postmodern text: "Fragmentation, segmentation, superficiality, stylistic jumbling, the blurring of mediation and reality, the collapse of past and future into the moment of the present, the elevation of hedonism, the dominance of the visual over the verbal"' (1992, 15). Tartikoff's idea would seem to have been to combine these elements with a strong narrative so that viewers were doubly hooked. Yerkovich and Mann's solution was to develop a cop show which structurally resembled the most popular cop show of the 1970s, *Starsky and Hutch*, but to set the show in a context where there could be a much greater opportunity for visual impact, to include a soundtrack of 1980s popular music, and to have the show edited in a rapid style that was familiar to film and *MTV* viewers. In an interview for *Time* in September, 1985, Lee Katkin, one of the directors used on *Miami Vice*, remarked that: "The show is written for an *MTV* audience which is more interested in images, emotions and energy than plot and character."

Mann had already worked in film as well as television. Having studied English at the University of Wisconsin-Madison he then took a course at the London International Film School. In the mid-1970s Mann wrote four episodes of *Starsky and Hutch*. Further

signalling the close connection between the shows, Paul Michael Glaser, who played Detective Dave Starsky, later directed three *Miami Vice* episodes. Mann released his first feature film, *Thief*, in 1981 and his second, *The Keep*, in 1983.

For Mann, one aspect of bringing greater visual stimulation to *Miami Vice* was to use film values—that is, to produce the show with as much emphasis on its visual impact as is given in a feature film. Crucial to the visuality of *Vice* was the conceit that the two lead characters, the white James Crockett and Black and Hispanic Ricardo Tubbs, are undercover detectives in the Miami vice squad. Where Starsky and Hutch frequently went undercover for specific operations, often wearing unusual or outrageous clothes that provided some of the show's humour, it seemed necessary in *Miami Vice* for Crockett and Tubbs to remain permanently in their undercover costumes even when at the police station. Since their undercover identities were of two well-heeled drug dealers this enabled them to be outfitted in men's fashions from the trendiest up-and-coming designers—the t-shirt and pastel jacket look, which the show popularised, was designed for it by Gianni Versace himself—and for Crockett to drive a black 1972 Ferrari Daytona Spyder (after Series Two he drove a white Ferrari Testarossa)—a cut above Starsky's red Ford Gran Torino with a white stripe down the side. For *Miami Vice*, style, especially male style, was a serious matter, a matter of high fashion and corresponding wealth. Crockett also wore a Rolex Presidential Day Date watch in 18 carat gold which retailed in 1984 for around \$16,000.

Acknowledging its importance in changing attitudes towards the making of television series, *Miami Vice* was nominated for twelve Emmys in 1985 ranging across editing, directing, cinematography, music composition and costume. Don Johnson (Crockett) was nominated for Outstanding Lead Actor in a Drama Series, and Jeffrey Howard and Robert Lacey Jnr won an Emmy for Outstanding Art Direction for a Series, Edward James Olmos, who played Lieutenant Martin Castillo, also won an Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series. In 1986 the show was nominated for a further four Emmys with one more nomination in 1988. Johnson and Olmos also won Golden Globes for their performances in 1986 and Philip Michael Thomas (Tubbs) was nominated. Johnson was nominated again in 1987 and in both years the show was nominated for Best TV Series-Drama. The show received a number of other nominations, especially for the first two seasons.

The 1970s and 1980s marked a watershed in the acceptance of style as an aspect of male fashion. It was during these decades that marketers started successfully persuading male consumers that it was not effeminate to look stylish and fashionable. That style was a problematic area for masculinity is highlighted in the way that, historically in films, its presence was coded negatively—that is, the erotic charge of the desirability of stylish male-oriented consumer goods was linked to characters who had problematic or villainous characteristics. We can think, for example, of Marlon Brando's character in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, released in 1951, and his iconic white t-shirt, and the further popularisation of that same white t-shirt by way of James Dean's character in *Rebel Without a Cause*, released four years later in 1955. This negative context for male fashion style is also present in the film which precursed *Miami Vice* in its preoccupation with male fashion, Paul Schrader's *American Gigolo* released in 1980. The style elements of *Miami Vice*'s visual appeal can be found in a combination of *American Gigolo* and Brian de Palma's *Scarface* (1983) which will be discussed later. In *American Gigolo* Richard Gere plays Julian Kaye who finds himself framed for a murder. As Stella Bruzzi writes:

The moment which, for better or worse, has become synonymous with Armani's involvement in film is the sequence in *American Gigolo* when Julian (Richard Gere), the high-class gigolo of the title, is getting ready to go out cruising. Dressed so far only in a pair of grey trousers, Julian swaggers and shuffles to the beat of a bland pop music track, rifles through a copious collection of Armani-labelled jackets, ties and shirts, assembles alternative combinations on the bed and finally, having decided on the right ensemble, admires himself in the mirror. (1997, 26)

Bruzzi's point is that: 'For all the scholarly interest in Julian's sexuality, *American Gigolo* is a clothes movie, the objects of fetishism are not Julian but what he wears' (1997, 26). In this, *American Gigolo* is a watershed. It was the first Hollywood film where viewers, especially men, are enticed to fetishise men's, rather than women's, clothes. Following this development, *Miami Vice* achieved the same result for a mass television audience.

Nevertheless, in both *American Gigolo* and the *Miami Vice* series male fashion style continued to be associated with undesirable characters. Julian Kaye, as Bruzzi points out, was a high-class gigolo. In *American Gigolo* the style has a complex sexual connotation where the commodification of male style is linked with the commodification

of male sexuality. In *Miami Vice* there is no narratival sexualisation of male style. Rather, male style is associated with the Hispanic mobsters who are taking over Miami. Crockett and Tubbs spend almost all their time impersonating big time drug dealers and the like. So much so that we, the audience, easily forget that their clothes and cars are actually costumes. There is, therefore, an ambiguity about their image. The series codes negatively the stylish fashions that Crockett and Tubbs, and the villains, wear but it also naturalises them within the show's diegesis, allowing them to be fetishised, and making them appear as desirable acquisitions for the show's viewers. As part of this fetishising process, Johnson/Crockett himself became a sex symbol. Because Crockett and Tubbs always appear with these accoutrements, viewers forget that Crockett, for example, is 'really' a local boy who had a reputation as a football player, did two tours in Vietnam and likes southern rock and country artists like Buddy Holly, Waylon Jennings and Dickie Betts—whose music would be highly unlikely to ever appear on *Miami Vice* because they lack the requisite stylish cachet. The mobster style becomes naturalised as the new—and imported both of in the sense of the style itself apparently arriving with the new Hispanic presence and in the sense that the stylish commodities themselves are imported—male American fashion. This association of male fashion with the undesirable Hispanics adds an ambiguity to the visual pleasure of *Miami Vice*. The police have to wear the style but the viewers' pleasure helps to assimilate and naturalise this importation. It is as if, even in the way viewers take their pleasure in the series, the Hispanics are infiltrating and undermining Anglo-American, puritan values.

Michael Mann—the Auteur's Preoccupations

As the producer of *Miami Vice*, Mann might appear to have been quite distanced from the show. However, he took a very hands-on role. In their book, *The Making of Miami Vice*, published in 1986, Trish Janeshutz and Rob MacGregor write this:

What VICE is about is impressionistic realism. "If people went out to look for the Miami depicted in VICE, they wouldn't find it because it exists up here," [Mann] says, tapping his temple. "We take the city as it is and then enhance certain parts of it through night time shooting, the characters, the overall look of the show form follows function."

Mann established the form and maintains it through scrupulous attention to detail. (1986, 175)

In order to understand the form Mann established we can look at the pattern that is articulated in his films. Mann's worldview provides a structure for *Miami Vice* through which was reinforced the historical anxieties of the late 1970s and early 1980s about the place of the United States in a world that was experienced by Americans as being increasingly out of their control.

For my purposes, the most important commentator on Mann's cinema has been Jean-Baptiste Thoret. Thoret's article is titled 'The Aquarium Syndrome.' He argues that Mann's films offer a meditation on the sense that there is something more than the reality in which we live. Thoret begins with an impressionistic description of the syndrome:

All is breakaway and exteriority on this impossible island which is a goldfish bowl. And we find our mouth stuck to its glass wall. We spend days dreaming about the world in front of us but we know that coming out of the water would be fatal.... It often happens that we believe another possible world exists, a world where there will be neither walls, nor glass nor artificial rockery. But what we see beyond, from our glass cage, looks like another aquarium, bigger, but in the end identical. (2002)

Thoret captures well the impression in Mann's films that there is always another world, that certain characters speak to each other, and interact more generally, across a fundamental divide. Mann's technique for exploring this is to set up key characters as alter-egos of each other, as doppelgängers. Thoret describes Mann's practice this way:

Disturbed optics, the supreme Mannian *plastique*, always give form to the world's aporias. Wherein the (postmodern?) alterity focused on the figure of the double, which appears in his films as early as *Manhunter* (Will/Freddie Lounds [Stephen Lang]), and reappears notably in the traits of the Neil/Vincent Hanna (Pacino) couple in *Heat*. (2002)

However, for all his incisive discussion, what is missing from Thoret's work is the role that law plays in Mann's films.

We should remember that many of Mann's films, *Thief*, *Manhunter* (1986), *Heat* (1995), and including the made-for-television *The Jericho Mile* (1979) and *LA Takedown* (1989), are about crime and criminals. In Mann's films, the law is not the psychoanalytic, Lacanian Law of the Father produced and reproduced in the family and writ large in the establishment of society and, subsequently, the order of the State. Rather, the law is a

manifestation of the state, and the space within which the law is enacted is where everyday life, most obviously manifested in Mann's films in families, is made possible and takes place. In *Heat* there is a scene where the detective, Vincent, played by Al Pacino, has coffee with Neil, the career criminal played by Robert de Niro. Vincent asks: 'So you never wanted a regular type life?' and Neil replies: 'What the fuck is that—barbeques and ball games?' Vincent answers, 'Yeah.' In the world outside of the law a 'regular,' everyday life is impossible. Neil attempts to escape with Eady, a graphic designer, a woman from the world of law, but he has to leave her before, in the end, Vincent tracks him down and kills him.

In *Thief* James Caan plays Frank, a professional thief who wants to move over to the world of everyday life and families. He carries with him a montage of the life he wants, a wife, child, a father figure. Frank persuades Jessie (Tuesday Weld) to live with him. Jessie agrees, not because she loves Frank but because it is an arrangement that suits her. She can't have children so the couple buy one. Frank's family is not the authentic nuclear family of everyday life but a simulation, which is all that is possible when you live outside the law. Frank has agreed to work for the crime boss Leo (Robert Prosky), who also arranged the child for Jessie and Frank. When he tries to leave Leo's organisation he finds this is impossible. Leo wants to destroy his 'family' and kill him. Frank sends Jessie and the child away. She says: 'We just disassemble it [the family] like an erector set you send back to the store?' The answer has to be in the affirmative. Frank torches the house, his second-hand caryard and the bar he owns, and kills Leo. This is life in the world outside of the law.

Outside the space ordered by the law no regular life is possible. When the reality produced by the law and the other world outside the law meet there is always, in Mann's films, what many viewers experience as extreme violence. In *Manhunter* Will, the ex-policeman who has been asked to come back by the police to track down a serial killer, crashes through the window of the killer's house. In this scene, an aspect of the horror is that the domestic, the conventional site of the everyday, has here become transformed into the space beyond the law. The killer picks up a gun and shoots through other windows at the police outside. In this extended scene the killer's world collides with the regular world of everyday life. The walls of the house function as a metaphor for the divide between the two worlds.

Will has a family, a wife and child. It is a marker of his status within the law. However, they become threatened by the serial killer. The price police pay for patrolling the edge of the law, for keeping safe the space where the law runs, is that they take on some of the characteristics of those who live outside of the space of the law. This is most obvious in the failure of their families. It is clear that if Will were to have stayed in the police force his wife and child would have left him. In *Heat* Vincent's partner throws him out.

Whiteness and the Border

Yercovich and Mann were intent on giving *Miami Vice* a very strong sense of place and, with that, the show also fed off a set of historical preoccupations. Where *Starsky and Hutch*, though filmed in Los Angeles, had been set in the mythical Bay City—Starsky and Hutch worked for the Bay City Police Department—it is clear, right from the name of the show, that *Miami Vice* is set in Miami.

How is the show's Miami constructed? In an article concerned with the relationship between style and vice in the show, R.L. Rutsky argued that:

In *Miami Vice*, the city of Miami becomes, much like the Los Angeles of *film noir*, a world where appearances are deceiving. On its surface, the city is presented as a paradise, a point which is made quite evident not only in the opening and closing credits...but also in explicit statements by the characters. Yet the show also trades on Miami's reputation as a center for international drug trafficking and its position as the nation's leader in violent crime. (1988, 77)

Appearances are deceiving right through *Miami Vice*, a point to which we must return, but in relation to the city itself the situation is more complicated. Janeshutz and MacGregor comment that:

The strong sense of place and stylization of Miami have not only soothed the concerns of the city's boosters, but have distinguished the series. Drugs, murder, and decadence are balanced by the striking beauty of bleached white beaches, art deco decor, and tropical ambiance. (1986, 14)

The stylisation, it would seem, was good for tourism and the fact that, as is required by the cop show genre, in the end, one way or another, the police come out on top, helped to give the city a positive spin. The comparison here should be with de Palma's *Scarface*

which '[c]ity officials...chased out of Miami' (Janeshutz and MacGregor 1986, 12) because they felt the film would worsen the city's image. For Mann, himself:

"I figured Miami was a perfect location for the show... It was riddled with expatriates, drugs, organized crime, and was a banking center for Latin America. It had all the elements." (Quoted in Janeshutz and MacGregor 1986, 177)

Yercovich's script for the pilot was titled *Gold Coast*. It seems to have been Mann's decision to foreground Miami. In Mann's reasoning it was the non-American criminal element in Miami, 'expatriates,' 'banking center for Latin America,' which attracted him to the city. With the insight afforded by the discussion of Mann's films we can also understand that, for Mann, Miami could be read as an expression of the border between the world of law and the other, lawless world—in this case, the world outside the United States.

Before 1980, which was, as we shall see, a watershed year for the image of Miami because of, among other events, the landing of the Marielitos, Miami's image was as a tropical paradise for tourists and retirees with a predominantly white population. After 1980, which also included a very violent riot by Miami's African-American population who felt increasingly discriminated against by both the white and Hispanic sectors of Miami society, Miami took on a very different image. Now it was seen as the American city most obviously on both the temporal and spatial border of a Hispanic migrant invasion, a city at the vanguard of what could happen across the rest of the United States. As Mann's quotation implies, the migrants were seen as being responsible for the increase in cocaine importation, organised crime more generally, and massive amounts of money made illegally which was washed into the general economy.

How then, did *Miami Vice* fit into this construction? As Rutsky suggests, the primary aspect of the Miami of *Miami Vice* is that it is a tropical paradise. More specifically it is a tropical paradise for white Americans. In this understanding the already-present, law-abiding Hispanics were accepted as 'local colour,' giving Miami that sense of difference which marks off a utopian paradise but also a safe familiarity in that they accept the law and are English-speaking. In other words they are assimilated into American society. The dominant image of the Miami of the show, then, is nostalgic. The paradisiacal quality of this image signals the conservatism of the show. Temporally, the

series pivots along the edge of Miami's transformation. This is one way that the show reproduces Mann's preoccupation with the worlds of law and lawlessness. Shots of the beach in the episodes show it full of white people, rarely any recognisable Hispanics.

Janeshutz and MacGregor remark that:

Most of the buildings in Miami don't fit the look of the show, creating a weekly challenge to find locations which work. "One of the rules is no brick, reds or browns. We also stay away from Mediterranean architecture". (1986, 15-16)

Although shot in Miami, only a very limited amount of the city actually looked like the Miami of *Miami Vice*. For example, as the quotation indicates, there is a lot of Mediterranean architecture in Miami. This often has elements suggesting a 'Spanish' look. Developed in the first two decades of the twentieth century:

Its connotations of Mediterranean resort architecture, combining expressions of Italian, Moorish, North African and Southern Spanish themes, was found to be an appropriate and commercially appealing image for the new Floridian seaside resort. (The Miami Beach art deco district)

That is, for Miami. For *Miami Vice* this suggestion of the indigenisation of the Hispanic, and associated Mediterranean elements, would have been unsettling.

The dominant architectural style in *Miami Vice* was art deco. The stylisation of art deco, by comparison to Mediterranean architecture, was northern European and assimilative. Art deco design is characteristically thought of as being popularised by the 1925 Paris Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. It is described as the modern synthesis of art and industrial design: clean and geometric lines, and with a decorative language drawn from a wide variety of cultures all reworked in the stylised art deco style.

In Miami, buildings continue to be built in versions of Mediterranean style but not in art deco. Art deco is a style associated with Miami's past. At the time *Miami Vice* was being made there had recently developed a new interest in Miami's art deco architecture. In 1979 the Miami Beach Architectural Historic District, which held Miami's art deco environment, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This area was primarily South Beach where, inevitably, a lot of *Miami Vice*'s external shots were filmed a few years later. The show's use of art deco as its dominant styling reinforced the

nostalgic presentation of Miami, emphasising a northern European rather than Mediterranean and Hispanic influence, as well as providing a pleasurable, modern, visual effect which offered a complimentary backdrop for the European designer-label clothes worn by Crockett and Tubbs.

At a deep level what was central to this stylish return to the 1930s in *Miami Vice* were the connotations of the racial certainties of that period for Americans. It was a time when the United States saw itself as hegemonically white and was determined to preserve this hegemony. It was also a time when there was a scientific certainty over which groups could be considered white and when whiteness was understood to be predominantly confined to people from northern Europe. The first law concerned with the general restriction of immigrants to America, the Johnson-Reed Act, a law designed to preserve the racial proportions within the United States as they had been at the census of 1890 by reflecting those proportions in the annual migrant intake, had been passed in 1924. The Act made law the recommendation of the Report of the Eugenics Committee of the United States Committee on Selective Immigration which:

argued that a formula based on the 1890 census rather than on a more recent one “would change the character of immigration, and hence of our future population, by bringing about a preponderance of immigration of the stock which originally settled this country.” North and West Europeans, read the report, were of “higher intelligence” and hence provided “the best material for American citizenship.” (Jacobson 1998, 83)

Throughout the inter-war period the American emphasis was on the Americanisation and assimilation of migrants. Howard Hawkes’ original version of *Scarface*, released in 1932, had migrant Italian gangsters—clearly neither properly white nor properly American. It was a time when those who thought of themselves as white Americans felt able to assert their right to protect their borders from the unwanted intrusion of those identified as non-white.

Within this nostalgic setting, almost every week on *Miami Vice* viewers were treated to the Organized Crime Bureau, the vice squad, attempting to stem the apparent flood of illegal commodities, drugs, guns, unlawful profits, which would, if not stopped, destabilise American society. Buxton writes that:

The very free enterprise system on which American society is founded has produced a twin, foreign menace; a junk capitalism from the Third World (especially Columbia) which dumps worthless, destructive commodities on the American market, feeding a never-ceasing demand for the Vice which is destroying society from within, and a more advanced capitalism from Japan and Europe whose commodities have outperformed the Americans at their own game. (1990, 149)

This, we should note, was an important shift from *Starsky and Hutch* and expressed the new American concern with the world outside the United States as being lawless and threatening. In *Starsky and Hutch* the detectives' focus was on local crime, crime within Bay City. In *Miami Vice*, Mann's vision of a world of law and a world of lawlessness mapped onto a developing American perception of the United States as the world of law and the world outside the United States as a lawless world. In the show, Miami was constructed as the site of the divide, the border between these two worlds.

As we now know, much of the influx of 'worthless, destructive commodities' identified by Buxton was caused by American foreign policy. For example, also in 1980, the CIA supported the so called 'cocaine coup' in Bolivia. The result of a junta of Bolivian generals coming to power was that:

The amount of cocaine produced in Bolivia rocketed from 35,000 metric tons in 1980 to 60,000 metric tons a year by the late 1980s. Nearly all of it was marked for sale in the US. (Cockburn & St. Clair 1998, 184)

In 1979, after the Sandinista overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, groups opposing the new government began to combine together under the general name of the Contras. Towards the end of his first year as president, in November 1981, Reagan signed a Directive empowering the CIA to support the Contras with \$19 billion of military aid. The Contras supplemented this funding with drug-running. Some of the large amounts of money from this operation went to Miami, more was banked in the Bahamas (for some of this background see Cockburn & St. Clair 1998, Chapter 12: 'The CIA, Drugs and Central America'). However, for Crockett and Tubbs, paralleling and reproducing the anxieties of white Americans in the early 1980s, it was the Hispanics themselves that were the problem. In other words the show shifted the problem from the secret workings of American foreign policy to individuals who were classed as members

of a non-American, non-white racial group. For example, over the first two series one of the most important threats comes from the Colombian drug lord Esteban Calderon who, indeed, has killed Tubbs' police detective brother in the first episode of the pilot, and later, after Calderon is killed by Crockett, from Calderon's son.

Reflecting Mann's own world-view, *Miami Vice* was the first cop show in which the permeability of the border was central to the narrative. Renato Rosaldo recognised the importance of the border in the show in an article he published in 1988. He writes that: 'The site of the implosion of the Third World into the first, the border has been portrayed, among other places, in the popular television series, *Miami Vice*' (1988, 85). Making a general point about the pervasive racism of the show, Rosaldo argues that:

Stereotypic Latino figures—flamboyant, slimy, lazy, cowardly—pervade the episodes, as American viewing audiences reinforce or learn forms of prejudice that probably will prove useful during the coming decade. Official pronouncements about the "Decade of the Hispanic" barely conceal diffuse anxieties about the impending impact of demographic projections for Latinos in the United States. (1988, 85)

There was immediate confirmation in Miami of Rosaldo's point. In 1988 in a referendum on an English Only amendment to the Florida State Constitution: 'Eighty-four per cent of Florida voters approved the amendment in the November election' (Portes & Stepick 1993, 161). American concerns over the official use of languages other than English had been growing since the beginning of the decade when, in 1980, Florida's Dade County, which includes Miami and is now known as Miami-Dade, prohibited public funds to be used for any language other than English. In 1987 legislation making English the official language was passed in five states and in 1988, in addition to Florida, Colorado and Arizona both passed similar laws. In Florida the anxiety over Hispanic immigration was felt most strongly: 'By the time of the 1988-89 Nicaraguan refugee crisis, old-time liberal and conservative political positions in Miami seemed to dissolve into either non-Latin anti-immigrant or Latin pro-immigrant views' (Portes & Stepick 1993, 161). *Miami Vice* was at the forefront of the white expression of these anxieties over non-English-speaking immigration.

Mann's Vice

Mann's vision reinforces the importance of the border. By the late 1970s the general American perception of the world beyond the United States coincided with Mann's worldview of what lay beyond the space ordered by law. Reagan took the presidency in a landslide election in 1980. As Robert Pastor writes: '[Reagan's] campaign for the presidency in 1980 was a continuous refrain that the United States could—and if he was elected would—take charge of its destiny and the world's' (1990, 34). The context for this was an ever greater perception through the last years of Jimmy Carter's presidency that the world outside the United States was spiralling into a chaos which was increasingly threatening to America:

Central America loomed large in President Reagan's policy, but other developments were more important in bringing him to power. Hostages in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the perception of a Soviet military build-up in the world, inflation, and sky-rocketing oil prices—together these events left Americans feeling that they were losing control, that they were retreating from the assaults of hostile forces and powers. (Pastor 1990, 34)

It is worthwhile detailing the Iran hostages event a little more. On November 4th, 1979, a group of students in Tehran occupied the American embassy taking sixty-six hostages. With negotiations for their release stalled Carter approved a secret rescue mission which took place during the night of April 24th, 1980. This failed miserably and embarrassingly. The apparent impotence of the United States in the face of the actions in Iran was a major factor in the electoral defeat of Carter by Reagan. Carter never stopped working for the release of the hostages though, and, in a fine irony, they were released on January 20th, 1981, the day of Reagan's presidential inauguration. Perhaps more than any other event at this time, the Iran hostages seizure reinforced American impressions that the world outside of the United States was fundamentally lawless.

In *Miami Vice* Mann's vision of this lawless world beyond the border mediated this general understanding. As we have seen, that world was awash with drugs, guns, and money that needed laundering. That world also has corrupt senior police ('Calderone's (sic) Demise'), a French Interpol agent with whom Crockett falls in love but whom he has to kill before she kills Tubbs ('French Twist'), and so on. Most obviously, that world does not contain families. The clearest example of this is the Calderons. Calderon's children were born to different women and we never see him with a partner. Indeed,

when Crockett and Tubbs first come across Calderon's daughter, Angelina, they assume she must be Calderon's high-class prostitute. If we look for the doppelgänger structure that we find in Mann's films, the most obvious example is Crockett and Tubbs and their ongoing battle with the Calderons. As I have mentioned, Calderon killed Tubbs' brother. Later, Crockett kills Calderon. Subsequently, Calderon's son returns to take vengeance. Tubbs falls in love with Angelina. All this interweaving of life narratives suggests the extent to which the detectives live on the edge of the lawless world.

That Crockett and Tubbs, at various times, both fall in love with women from that lawless world suggests how close to the lawless police are. In the pilot we see that Crockett is married with a son. He has attachments in the everyday world. However, as is typical of Mann's universe, Caroline is leaving Crockett because she can't handle his work as a policeman. In a 1986 article, Andrew Ross comments incisively on the series' title, *Miami Vice*, that it 'establishes an uneasy equivalence between the legitimate and the deviant' and goes on to argue that, 'the putative origin of the whole series lies in the words of Crockett's wife, who is about to divorce him in the pilot show: 'You and your vice-cop buddies are just the flip side of the same coin from those dealers you're always masquerading around with'' (1986, 152). They are the flip side but they are on the side of law and the order it enables.

Tubbs' situation is complicated. He, and his brother, are part-Hispanic. Tubbs' brother's forename was Raphael and his own is Ricardo. Tubbs is less securely on the side of the law than Crockett. Indeed, Tubbs' undercover last name is 'Cooper' but he keeps 'Rico' suggesting a link between his two personas. After his brother's death he follows Calderon to Miami using false documents to introduce himself to the Organized Crime Bureau. For a while, until Crockett finds out the truth, Tubbs pretends to be his dead brother. It is never clear that his status in the Organized Crime Bureau is regularised. Crockett is always very clear about where his personal border is as regards the law. Often, he has to rein Tubbs in. Tubbs' position as having one foot outside the law can be read as expressing white American anxiety over the status of Hispanics within the United States. We can remember de Palma's use of Cubans for gangsters in his remake of *Scarface*. In the show's racial hierarchy Crockett is pure white, and law-abiding, while Tubbs is a mixture of subordinate races, African American and Hispanic.

Thoret argues that: 'In Mann's films, ... the hero is not lonely—rather, he is alone' (2002). This is a good way of beginning to understand the character who is in

charge of the Organized Crime Bureau, Lieutenant Martin Castillo. The characters that are most fascinating in Mann's *oeuvre* are those closest to being outside the law but who manage to continue to uphold it. We can, for example, think of Will Graham again in *Manhunter*. Explaining what he does to his young son, he says 'I try to build feelings in my imagination like the killer had so that I would know why he did what he did because that would help me find him.' The last time he did this, Graham was so successful that he had a mental breakdown. At the end of season four and the beginning of series five Crockett has amnesia and believes himself that he really is an underworld gangster and, therefore, that the clothes, the yacht, the car, and so on are really his and really express the kind of man he is.

Castillo, unlike Crockett and Tubbs, is what he appears to be. He always dressed in black with a white shirt. Black and white are often not considered to be colours. In a show preoccupied with colour and which associates colour in clothes with masquerade this use of black and white can be read as absolute honesty. Olmos' Castillo is actually the second person to be lieutenant in the series. For the first four episodes Gregory Sierra played Lieutenant Lou Rodriguez. He had a wife and children, showed emotion, and clearly had come up through the ranks. Rodriguez had affinities with the African-American Captain Dobey (Bernie Hamilton) in *Starsky and Hutch*. He, too, had come up through the ranks and, while in charge within the show's police hierarchy, was subordinate in terms of who was presented as most important to viewers thus conservatively reasserting the established racial order. The same conservatism obtained for *Vice*'s Rodriguez.

Played by Olmos, a Latino from East Los Angeles, Castillo, as his name suggests, is a Hispanic. However, his character is entirely different to Rodriguez. He is removed from the social interaction of the Crime Bureau. Indeed, his history is not even in the police force. In the episode, 'Bushido,' a CIA operative says to him:

"You guys go back, you go way back to the Golden Triangle, to Cambodia. But the real funny thing is, that neither one of you existed before Vietnam. You just dropped right out of the computer—even deep background".'

Castillo, of course, has no wife though we do find out that he was once involved with a woman in South East Asia. Structurally, Castillo comes over as the Other who is on 'our'

side. In Mannian terms, Castillo can be read as a character that has come over to the world of law from the world of lawlessness and who retains the sensibility of that world. He seems to have no biography before Vietnam—was he born and brought up in the United States or elsewhere? And he has a menacing and enigmatic quality because he is both within the American police and race hierarchies but also remains to some always unknown extent outside of them. The impression is that he has made a decision to be American, to live within the world of law, unlike Crockett and Tubbs who are, unquestioningly, American.

Ross remarks that: '*Miami Vice* and its moment in American TV history comes at the end of a decade of attempts to reconstruct the credibility of male institutional authority from the vacuum created by Vietnam' (1986, 150). In this context it is no wonder that both Crockett and Castillo served in Vietnam, though while Crockett was clearly a lowly grunt, Castillo was obviously a highly trained special services operative. From fighting communist insurgency and attempting to stop the fall of South East Asia to communism in the 'domino effect,' the two are now bound together fighting a transgressive, lawless incursion into the United States. It is as if the loss of the Vietnam War has allowed this threat of lawlessness to come to the very border of the United States.

In 'Bushido,' Castillo has to kill his closest friend and colleague from those days in South East Asia. Jack Gretsky has fallen in love with a Russian agent. They have got married and each has tried to leave their respective agencies. This, being Mann's vision, is impossible. Both sides want them. When one is so far out on the border patrolled by the law it is very difficult to tell where the law ends. There is a solution, however. Castillo says to his old friend: "I can't let you walk. It's my duty. It's what I am". Castillo's duty comes from his decision to be American. In the end, it is also duty which resolves Crockett's ethical issues and separates, in practice, his 'masquerading'—the term used by Crockett's wife in the pilot episode—work self from his 'real' self.

Miami and the Hispanic Invasion

By the early 1980s Miami was a city undergoing a rapid and fundamental transformation. In their discussion of the city, *City on the Edge*, which indeed is subtitled 'The Transformation of Miami,' Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick write that:

Nineteen eighty was some year. If you were an old native, you probably still believed that nothing much had really changed to Miami, that immigrants would eventually learn English and life would go on as usual. Yet as with all major processes of change, the forces underlying the dramatic events of that year had long been at work, unknown and unforeseen by those whose lives they were about to transform. They irrupted in 1980. (1993, 18)

In that year, over a six month period, Fidel Castro allowed 125,000 people to leave Cuba from the port of Mariel. These Marielitos came into a city of 1,625,781 people of whom 48% were white of non-Spanish origin, 35% were of Spanish origin and 17% were Black (Portes & Stepick 1993, 20).

These Marielitos, who arrived in Miami on boats chartered by the local Cuban community, were stigmatised both by Castro and by the English-language media in Miami and across the United States. The influx increased anxieties among the white population about Hispanic migration in particular but non-white migration more generally. Portes and Stepick tell us that:

Between 1977 and 1981, approximately sixty thousand Haitians arrived by boat in South Florida. The number was only about one-fifth the size of New York's Haitian population, but the impact that these "boat people" had in the receiving city [Miami] was immeasurably greater. (1993, 51)

They go on to write that:

In 1980, the Third World laid claim to Miami. The Haitian boat flow peaked right at the time of the Cuban flotilla, the two became inseparable in the public mind. (1993, 51)

In de Palma's *Scarface*, Tony Montana had arrived in Miami as a Marielito. de Palma's 1983 remake of Hawkes' film was, as we have seen, set in Miami. Hawkes' *Scarface* was set in Chicago and had Italian migrants as gangsters. de Palma's film tracks Montana's rise and fall. It was this focus on crime that the Miami boosters hated. In *Miami Vice* episodes the focus is on the police and the bad guys are inevitably brought to justice. Montana gets into the drug trade, importing large quantities of cocaine from Bolivia before finally being killed by assassins working for his Bolivian connection, Alejandro Sosa (Paul Shenar), when he fails to keep his end of a deal. de Palma's film

was one of the influences on the prominence of style in *Miami Vice*. Although de Palma did not use a fashion designer in the film, it nevertheless has a strong visual style. When he made his next gangster film, *The Untouchables*, in 1987, Giorgio Armani worked on the costumes. One element that contributes to *Scarface*'s visual style is the use of South Beach's art deco apartment blocks as the setting for Montana's first drug deal. As we have seen, these art deco buildings would later play a central role in the visual styling of *Miami Vice*.

Indeed, *Miami Vice*'s concentration on Miami's art deco built environment contributed to a further acknowledgement of that heritage in Miami. Janeshutz and MacGregor tell us that:

The show's focus on Miami's art deco architecture has spurred the restoration of several art deco buildings along Miami Beach. And numerous publications, which once snubbed or ignored Miami, took a new look at the city. (1986, 13-14)

Miami Vice's mythic, retro Miami, which, in the referentiality of the original art deco era also conjured up an earlier time of American gangsterism, as it did in the *Scarface* remake in the 1980s, helped reinforce the gentrifying vogue for renovating buildings, and indeed whole precincts, in their original 'look' and established the nostalgic subtext of the show, recalling a mythic time when migration seemed more under control and migrants could be assimilated.

Race in the Organized Crime Bureau

Signalling the extent to which anxieties over race were central to *Miami Vice*, and to its popularity, the show presents a very racially conservative diegetic America. In doing this, the show offers white Americans a safe and reassuring world continuing to be dominated by white Americans with other racialised groups occupying their established and traditional places in the American race hierarchy. In Mannian terms, this is the world ordered by American law. The clearest expression of this racial world is the racialised structure of the Organized Crime Bureau itself. In *Starsky and Hutch* the two lead characters, Dave Starsky and Ken Hutchinson are constructed as white. While, as David Buxton puts it, Starsky has 'New York Jewish street-kid origins' (Buxton 1990, 129), any question as to his Americanness, and his whiteness, which might also be related to Paul Michael Glaser's Jewish background, are set aside by Starsky's assimilated behaviour. In

any case, by the 1970s Jews in the United States were considered to be white (on the history of the whitening of Jews in the United States after the Second World War, see Brodtkin 1998). The relationship between the two lead characters played out in the conventions of the “buddy” films established by *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) (Paul Cullum makes this point in his web article ‘*Starsky and Hutch*’). Indeed, so close was their friendship that, as Paul Cullum points out, the gay sub-text was hard to miss (Cullum) and, much of the time, provided the opportunity for the show’s comedy.

In *Miami Vice*, there is no comedy in Crockett and Tubbs relationship. Their job of upholding American law against Latin American and Caribbean transgressing invaders is deadly serious. The humour in the show is provided by their offsidiers, Stan Switek and Larry Zito. Not only are these two not central characters but they are clearly on a lower rung in the Crime Bureau’s hierarchy. As it happens, neither has an Anglo name. ‘Switek’ is Polish and ‘Zito’ is southern Italian. Both, then, were members of groups which, in the United States of the 1920s and 1930s, were not regarded as fully white. Within the show, their subordination is apparent not only in Crockett ordering them around—they are constantly back up for his and Tubbs operations—but also in the denigrating way that Crockett refers to them. ‘Girls’ was one of his favourite appellations. In a further diminishment, possibly not by chance, ‘Zito’ is, actually, a corruption of a word meaning ‘boy.’

The actual girls in the Crime Bureau are Gina Calabrese (Saundra Santingo) and Trudy Joplin (Olivia Brown). The former is Hispanic, the latter African-American. When they go undercover it is often as hookers. Where Crockett and Tubbs dress up in designer clothes, the women dress down. While it could be argued that this stylishness feminises Crockett and Tubbs, my point here is, rather, concerned with the demeaning of the vice women. In the office they, too, are often asked to do things by Crockett and he expects these things to take priority over their own work. Thus, the denigrating chauvinism demonstrated in Crockett’s use of ‘girls’ as a way of describing Switek and Zito pervades the show’s portrayal of the two women who work for the Bureau. Their marginalisation and subordination is reinforced and legitimated by their racial statuses as Hispanic and African-American and their presentation as prostitutes reinforces negative images of Hispanic and African-American women.

There is no equal buddy friendship in the dyadic relationship between Crockett and Tubbs such as I have noted exists in *Starsky and Hutch*. Commenting on Black and white buddy dyads in American films of the 1980s Christopher Ames remarks that:

Perhaps the most powerful appeal of the inter-ethnic bond lies in its denial of history. The violence in the American conquest of the wilderness was levied by white men against enslaved Africans and demonized Native Americans. Black and white joining forces against a definable evil freed of racial significance expresses a powerful mythic longing to reverse or purge historical guilt. (1992, 59-60)

However, the racial difference pervades Crockett and Tubbs' relationship. Their buddiness is constantly undermined by Crockett taking a position of authority. Rosaldo remarks that:

the 1984-86 seasons involve a play of racial domination more subtle than the Lone Ranger and Tonto. The black cop Tubbs consistently acts overly emotional (irrational) and has to be cared for by his white partner Crockett. (1988, 85)

As Rosaldo implies, at key moments Tubbs is structurally feminised in a subordinating order where white, male, rationality is privileged. Writing about the relationship Brenda Abalos uses the same analogy as Rosaldo: 'What draws my attention is the clear subordination of the black lead, to an extent that recalls the Lone Ranger/Tonto dyad' (1999, 168). Like the Lone Ranger and Tonto, Crockett and Tubbs, like buddies, trust and rely on each other, and they support each other in difficult professional and personal situations. However, like the Lone Ranger and Tonto, and unlike Butch Cassidy and Sundance, *Starsky and Hutch*, there is a racial differentiation which places Tubbs in an inferior position to Crockett. In general, as we have seen, the African American and Hispanic Tubbs is less law-abiding than the white Crockett, a part of whose responsibility is to keep Tubbs in line.

With blue-green eyes and hair that seemed to become blonder as the show went on, Johnson's Crockett came over semiotically as Anglo-white. His name reinforced this. Crockett, after all, was the name of the legendary late eighteenth and early nineteenth Tennessee frontiersman, Davy Crockett, who rose to be a Congressman and then, in 1835, left Tennessee for Texas. Texas declared its independence from Mexico in 1836. In that

same year, so myth has it, Crockett and the other defenders of the Alamo, massively outnumbered by the forces of the Mexican general Santa Anna, heroically fought to the last man giving Sam Houston time to gather forces and defeat Santa Anna at the Battle of San Jacinto, guaranteeing Texan independence. In *Miami Vice*, then, the connotations of Crockett's name are powerful, reinforcing his white Anglo-Americaness and, in addition, emphasising his position as someone who repels the Hispanic invaders.

At the beginning of the *Miami Vice* pilot, Crockett has a different partner, a Hispanic man called Eddie Rivera played by Jimmy Smits. However, Rivera is soon killed—collateral damage when Calderon, known here as 'The Columbian,' takes out a middleman who wanted to leave his organisation. One of the narrative threads of the remainder of the two episode pilot is concerned with how Crockett and Tubbs get to be partners. Tubbs, of course, remains Crockett's partner for the rest of the series. Why is it possible for Crockett to have an African-American partner but not a Hispanic? As a couple, Crockett and Tubbs offer the viewer the core of American identity: dominant white Anglo-American and a subordinate African-American working in harmony and friendship together. Given the American anxieties to which *Miami Vice* played, Crockett and Tubbs together, protecting the United States from Latin American and Caribbean invasion, would have been much more reassuring than Crockett and the Hispanic Rivera.

Miami Vice was made at a time when Americans were becoming more and more anxious about the world beyond the borders of the United States. That world was increasingly seen as lawless and as threatening to the well-being, the order which depended on the enforcement of the law, within the United States. If the Iran hostages seizure and other far-flung events contributed to this anxiety, the numbers of Hispanics arriving in the United States, and the perception that they were associated with illegal activities such as drug- and gun-running, and money-laundering, was the local focus of what was understood as a fundamental threat to the Anglo-American way of life. The early seasons of *Miami Vice* expressed these anxieties through Mann's worldview. The United States was diegetically constructed as the world of law and the world beyond America's border was constructed as the world of lawlessness. Miami was the site of the border between these two worlds.

In Mann's films detectives operate on the edge of a lawless world that exists within the United States in parallel with the world of law. In *Miami Vice*, while the United States was constructed as the world of law, the lawless world was constructed as the world beyond America's border. Thus, the border stood for both the limit of the rule of American law and for the moment of the divide from the lawless world. This construction reinforced the conservatism of the show's content. It also enabled the show to offer viewers a straightforward view of where responsibility lay for America's problems—in the world outside of the United States not in any malfeasance within the United States. At the same time, the show could reassure white Americans that the United States would remain white and safe by identifying Hispanics and people from the Caribbean as being the predominant source of the drugs and guns which were the most obvious sign of a threat to American order. In the show, the role of the Miami Organized Crime Bureau was to keep this threat at bay. Reflecting Mann's own preoccupations, what *Miami Vice* told its audience, beneath all the postmodernist masquerading and surface style, is that, in a world that was experienced as increasingly threatening to the United States since the country's loss in the Vietnam War, duty involved protecting the country and the space made safe by its law, from those whose actions, whether motivated by greed or something more sinister, would undermine its borders and its way of life.

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